

UUSJ Immigration Action Team 2021-2022 Annual Report

At the beginning of July 2021, Charlotte Jones-Carroll became the chair of the UUSJ Board, so the Immigration Action Team (IAT) selected Terry Grogan and Stephen Eckstrand as the new co-conveners. The team decided to continue advocating for pathways to citizenship for certain immigrants, alternatives to detention, and an end to the use of Title 42 to expel families, adults, and children seeking refuge at the southern border.

In July the IAT joined #WeAreHome, Faith in Action, and Side with Love to support pathways to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who are recipients of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Temporary Protected Status (TPS), farm workers, and essential workers. The IAT prepared an Action Alert urging both the House and the Senate to pass a budget that includes such pathways and that the Senate use the reconciliation process to get around a filibuster.

In August the Immigration Action Team prepared a letter to Vice President Harris and Secretary of Homeland Security Mayorkas to stop using the public health authority of Title 42 as a pretext to expel immigrants. In September the IAT sent a letter to President Biden opposing the expulsion of Haitian asylum seekers and refugees since Haiti was (and still is) suffering from the assassination of its president and the effects of an earthquake and a severe tropical storm.

During the Fall, the IAT organized and conducted meetings with 10 additional Congressional Offices. Recognizing the importance of having constituents in the meetings, the IAT directly contacted UU congregations in the relevant states and recruited 35 UUs to participate in the calls, as well as an additional 10 people from local immigrant rights organizations in three of the states. In addition, the IAT sent emails to the offices of ten moderate Democratic Representatives, whose votes would be needed to pass the budget bill in the House, seeking to meet with them to advocate for the inclusion of pathways to citizenship.

During one of our meetings with a Senate office, one of the constituents on the call described the profound mental health effects she had seen in the children of undocumented immigrants due to the constant fear that their parents might be deported. The IAT investigated this issue and sent a letter with supporting references to all of the staffers with whom we met and to the ten moderate Democratic Representatives whose votes may be critical in the House.

In January the team began a collaboration with the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) to demand an end to the use of Title 42 as justification for expelling asylum-seekers at the southern border. The first step was the release of the statement [Stop the Excuses: Biden Administration Must End Title 42](#) on January 20. The next phase included a letter to President Biden asking that he take steps to restore fair access to asylum as soon as possible and use his authority to end both the Title 42 and the so-called Migrant Protection Protocols (remain in Mexico policies). The letter was signed by nearly 800 UU congregations, organizations, and individual UUs. Finally, the IAT also prepared a Write Here! Write Now! letter-writing campaign that urged members of Congress to press the Biden Administration to end both Title 42 expulsions and forcing asylum seekers to wait in Mexico under MPP.

The IAT also sent a letter to the offices of all the Senators that we met with last year to express our concerns about the immigration justice system. Immigration courts are a part of the Department of Justice (DOJ), which is also the agency that is charged with prosecuting immigration cases in federal courts. We urged that the Senators introduce or co-sponsor a Senate companion bill to the Real Courts, Rule of Law Act of 2022 (H.R. 6577), which would create an immigration court system that is separate and independent from DOJ.

In April, the IAT participated in the April *Defund Hate Interfaith Day of Action*, which advocated for shifting Federal immigration funding from harmful and ineffective detention and enforcement to supporting immigrants at the border and in the community. UUSJ organized and led three Congressional meetings and participated in and promoted four additional meetings. Representatives from the other sponsoring groups, UUs, and other constituents participated in the campaign.

The IAT continued its work to open the southern border to asylum seekers. Partnering with the UU Service Committee (UUSC) and other UU organizations, it conducted three additional Congressional meetings pressing lawmakers to remove asylum obstacles such as the misuse of Title 42 health authority and the Remain in Mexico policy. UU and other constituents participated in these meetings.

With the mid-term elections coming up, the outlook for action on immigration issues looks bleak, so the IAT is looking for ways to

- promote different, more positive public messaging about immigration to change the political discourse regarding immigration justice proposals and
- increase the involvement of individual UU constituents in future meetings with Congressional Offices.

**Immigration Action Team
Active Members**

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